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ABSTRACT

This booklet is one of a series developed by the Northern Colorado Educational Board of Cooperative Services to make available to teachers ideas designed and tested by other teachers. Many of the ideas are from educational journals as well as from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). The booklet is divided into two sections, one dealing with character and one with plot. Each section contains suggestions for approximately ten activities, with the materials needed and the purpose of each activity explained. Some of the activities are to create and describe imaginary characters, to analyze character, to write a story from a different point of view, to write a conversation in play form, and to develop a plot. (TS)

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CREATIVE WRITING:

Activity Ideas for Character and Plot Development Grades 3 and 4

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For
Northern Colorado Educational Board of
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Dr. Walter G. Turner
Executive Director

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TO THE TEACHER:

It's not easy to be a teacher, to make each day alive and stimulating. We at NCEBOCS want to make your job a little easier. We've talked with teachers and learned that you especially need good ideas for activities, activities that students will enjoy while they learn the skills they need.

Creative Writing: Activity Ideas for Character and Plot Development, Grades 3 and 4 is one of a series of booklets developed by NCEBOCS to make available to teachers ideas designed and tested by other teachers. We gather these ideas from educational journals as well as from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), a nationwide system of educational information supported by the National Institute of Education (NIE).

This idea book is divided into two sections, one dealing with character and one with plot. These major divisions are indicated in the upper right hand corner of each page, followed by the "Purpose" which enables the teacher to determine which activities will best supplement a particular lesson. If special materials are required, they are listed under "Materials Needed." The activity follows.

The purpose of this idea book is to present you with suggestions dealing with one facet of creative writing. We hope you will modify some, create extensions for others, and jot down your own. As this booklet changes and grows, so will its utility and effectiveness for you.

PURPOSE: To create imaginary characters and describe them.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Unshelled peanuts (two or more for each student)
Toothpicks--round type preferred (four or more per student)
Glue

ACTIVITY: Provide students with peanuts, toothpicks and glue. Ask the students how they can use these materials to make an animal or a person. Encourage experimentation.

Note: For your information:

One possible procedure is:

1. Break the toothpicks in half.

2. Insert pointed ends of toothpicks into peanut shells for legs. (Glue may be necessary to keep them in place).

3. Add features with pens or pencils.

Peanut animals are easier to construct than peanut people, because of the difficulty in getting peanut people to stand, and in adding heads.

If students break the shells in half evenly, the nuts may be removed (and eaten!) and the shells reglued or cut and glued to each other to make heads and longer animals. Centipedes work out well this way.

This will be slow and difficult work for some students and you will need to allow for breakage.

When students have completed their animals, ask them to write a paragraph telling about the animal or animals they have created. To stimulate writing, suggest questions such as:

What kind of animal is it?

How would you describe it?

What is its name?

Where does it live?

What does it eat?

What does it like to do best?

PURPOSE: To create imaginary characters and describe them.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Clay

ACTIVITY: Ask students to use the clay to create a character. After they have created their character, ask them to write a short character sketch. Consider the following questions:

1. Is your character good, or bad, or some of each?
2. Is he cruel and heartless, or perhaps kind and thoughtful?
3. Is he always bungling things? Can he do everything well?
4. Is he talkative and outgoing or is he quiet? Is he painfully shy?
5. Do his feelings get hurt easily or doesn't he have feelings?
6. Is he gentle? Is he gruff and rowdy?

Suggest that it is important to make sure the character's personality fits with his appearance.

PURPOSE: To write an imaginative story about an obstinate animal.

ACTIVITY: Have the class name three or four familiar animals. Then discuss the activities of each animal. For example, if students have named a beaver, you might ask what activities they would expect to see if they were observing a beaver.

How does he move about?
How does he get his food?
What else does he do?

List activities suggested by students for each animal on the board.

Then ask students to think what would happen if an animal didn't want to do what was expected of him. For instance, suppose a little beaver couldn't learn to swim and didn't like to build dams. What are some other things he might want to do instead? (Fly? Live in a nest in a tree? Dig a warm hole in the ground like a rabbit? etc.)

After a number of ideas have been explored, have each student choose an animal and write a story about its adventures when it decided to be different.

Questions such as these could be used to help students develop their imaginative tales:

What things does the animal usually do?
In what way does your animal want to be different? Why?
What happens to him when he chooses to be different?
Does he ever decide to do the things he is supposed to do? What causes him to change?

PURPOSE: To discover something about an individual's personality by observing details in appearance and making inferences.

MATERIALS NEEDED:
1. Pictures of sports fisherman
2. Pictures of hands

ACTIVITY: Display pictures of fisherman and ask students to describe what they see.

Ask students:

1. Do you think any of the people in these pictures fish for a living? Why?
2. What do you suppose they do for a living? Why?
3. What about their appearance gives clues to the kind of people they are?

Display the pictures of the hands and ask similar questions. Through careful observation and consideration of details, students should be encouraged to think about people as having varied interests, attitudes, and personalities.

Ask students to create a character. Have them think about the character as real. What does the person look like, and how does he or she react in different situations. Have students draw their character concentrating on details that will give clues to his or her personality.

Then ask students to write a short episode in the character's life to reveal his or her personality.

PURPOSE: To use imagination and empathy.

ACTIVITY: Ask the students if they have ever wished they were someone else at school. If so, who, and when? If not, who would they rather be?

Encourage them by asking such questions as:

What would you do if you were _____?
What changes would you make at school?
How would you make them?

Ask the students to list the categories of various adults at their school. The list might include principal, teacher, cook, custodian, aide, counsellor, librarian, secretary, and so on. Write these on the chalkboard.

Then ask the students to choose one of these categories, and write a short essay entitled "If I Were Principal" (or Teacher, Cook, etc.) Allow for the fact that some students might prefer being themselves. If so, they might want to write something on the topic "If I Were in Sixth Grade," "If I Were in High School," or "Why I Like Being Me."

After students have finished, ask for volunteers to share their essays with the class.

PURPOSE: To analyze character.

ACTIVITY: When students have finished reading a story, ask them to imagine themselves in the context of that story. They might substitute themselves for one of the main characters. Ask them to then describe how the story would have been changed by their presence.

As a follow-up to this activity, students then might be encouraged to imagine how a character from a book would react in the students environment. Would it be fun to have that character in school every day? Would the character like the student's world?

PURPOSE: To provide experience in writing letters.

ACTIVITY: Ask students to choose two of their favorite characters from two different books they have read. Have them then write a letter tnat the first character might write to the second.

PURPOSE: To understand that a character may be developed through dialogue.

ACTIVITY: Have students think of all the times in the past when their mothers have asked them to clean up their rooms. Then ask each student to write the conversation that took place between them and their mother. Encourage them to show what kind of person she is through what she says and the way she says it.

PURPOSE: To provide students with an opportunity to think and write about themselves.

ACTIVITY: Ask students to keep a notebook entitled "About Me." Each week ask them to write a short story dealing with questions like the following:

What I like best...
Why I am proud ....
What makes me angry....
What I would like to do ....
What I would like to be ....

PURPOSE: To provide students with experience in completing a story.

ACTIVITY: Read the following story to the class and ask them to write a conclusion.

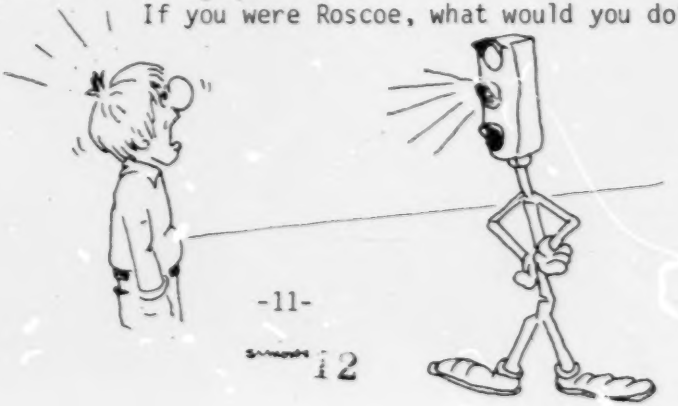
Once a stoplight named Roscoe hung in the middle of a busy intersection. He would change his lights from green to yellow to red, green-yellow-red, green-yellow-red, all day long, telling the cars when to go and when to stop. It was a very busy intersection and he saw many cars, trucks, and buses every day.

Sometimes even an ambulance or a fire truck came by with its siren sounding and its red lights flashing.

After many months, Roscoe got tired of his job. He thought, "Why do I always have to flash green-yellow-red, green-yellow-red, green-yellow-red, all day long? Why can't I change from green to red, or from yellow to green or from red to yellow? or why can't I stay on one color all day long, if I want to?"

The more Roscoe thought about it, the more stubborn he became. Then he decided what he would do.

Note: To stimulate students you might want to ask the following question:
If you were Roscoe, what would you do? Why?



PURPOSE: To provide students with experience in completing a story.

ACTIVITY: Divide the class into groups of three. Read the following story and ask each group to cooperatively write a conclusion.

Oscar was a poor little brown and white dog who did not have a home. He wandered from door to door. Sometimes a kind person would toss him a bite to eat, but this did not happen very often, and he was usually very hungry. Sometimes he was cold, and sometimes wet.

One day Oscar came to an old, two-story house sitting back in a large wooded lot. An old man opened the door and saw Oscar whimpering and shivering there. "Come on in, dog," the old man said. "You look lonely. I am lonely, too. I need company. I'll give you a home and something to eat."

So Oscar had a home at last. He grew fat and healthy.

One day the old man told Oscar, "You may not know it, little dog, but I am a great wizard. You have been good company to me. However, I must go on a long, long trip that will take many years, and I cannot take you along. So I have decided to use my magic and leave you lots and lots of money. You will be the richest dog in the world."

Note: Each group may want to act out a scene from Oscar's new life and write a play that could be presented to other classes.

PURPOSE: To write a story from a different point of view.

ACTIVITY: Ask students to tell what happened to their jack-o-lanterns on Halloween night. Then suggest that some jack-o-lanterns might have had some interesting stories to tell. Read the following story and ask them to give it an ending.

...It was the day after Halloween and several discarded jack-o-lanterns were lying on a trash pile. They were discussing their activities on Halloween night.

"I sat in a window the whole evening," said one sadly.

"My owner dropped me, and I really cracked my head," moaned another.

Two more pumpkins spoke at the same time, "We went trick or treating."

Suddenly the smallest pumpkin began to talk. "I didn't expect anyone to buy me," he said, "because I am rather lopsided, but a man came into the store on Halloween night and took me home with him. When we got to his house, I could hear excited voices, but it was quite a little while before the man cut some eyes in me so I could see. Next he carved me a nose so I could smell, and then he sliced me a great big mouth. I was going to say 'thank you', but then I remembered how upset people get when you talk to them."

A fat old pumpkin nodded his head wisely and muttered, "People don't think we can talk. It really shakes them up when they hear us."

The little pumpkin agreed and continued his story. "They put a candle in my middle, and I felt very warm. Then children in strange-looking costumes picked me up and carried me out into the dark windy night."

The little pumpkin's eyes grew very large and he whispered, "You'll never believe what happened them. . ."

Note: If students have difficulty getting started, ask the following questions:

1. Where did the children take the little pumpkin?

2. What did he see?

3. What did he hear?

4. How did he feel?

PURPOSE: To write a conversation in play form.

ACTIVITY: Hold up two erasers and ask students to imagine what it must be like to be an eraser.

Then ask the students, "If erasers had thoughts and feelings, would they enjoy being erasers?"

Ask the children to pretend it is after school, and two erasers, Chalky and Dusty, are talking to each other. What kinds of tales might two erasers tell to each other about what went on in the classroom?

Divide the class into pairs of students and ask each pair to write a dialogue between Chalky and Dusty. Show them how to write conversation in play form, stating the name of the speaker, and following it by a colon at the beginning of each speech.

Then, let students choose a partner and practice reading each other's dialogue. Discuss the need to read with expression. Perhaps a few volunteers would like to read their dialogue to the whole class.

PURPOSE: To organize a story and present it orally.

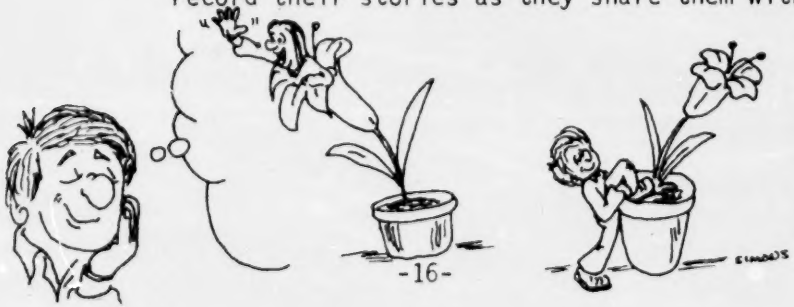
MATERIALS NEEDED: A few fresh flowers
(Daffodils or tulips if possible)

ACTIVITY: Begin this lesson by examining flowers and analyzing their structure. Point out that both the daffodil and the tulip have centers hidden by petals and could be used by a very small person as a resting or hiding place.

Ask students to imagine a garden where flowers do hide tiny creatures. Discuss such questions as:

What part of the flower would the little people live in? Could they live below ground and use the flower as a sundeck or lookout tower?
How might they travel from place to place? Might they use an animal for transportation? If so, which one(s)
What materials might they use to make their clothing?
How would they protect themselves from cold? from rain? from danger?
What games might they play?
What foods might they eat?
What adventures might they have?

Give students a few minutes to plan a story about little flower people. Then divide the class into two or three groups (as many groups as you have tape recorders and sound space for) and let them tape record their stories as they share them with the group.



PURPOSE: To provide students with practice in developing plot.

ACTIVITY: Bring in the box, saying something like, "I wonder if anyone can guess what is in the box?" Shake it and ask for guesses, keeping the time short. Then, in an air of expectancy, unwrap and open the box.

Tell the students that they were all curious about what was in the box and write the work curious on the board. Continue by saying that people are curious about many different things.

Then write "WHAT ARE YOU CURIOUS ABOUT?" on the chalkboard, and ask students to tell about things that sometimes make them wonder. List them on the board. If students have trouble thinking of things, ask such questions as:

> What do you wonder about when you are alone?
> What would you like to learn more about?
> Do you ever wonder what is behind a closed door? Or inside a trunk?
> If you saw a postman delivering a package, would you wonder what was in it?

When there is a considerable list of ideas, ask students what they do when they are curious about something. Elicit answers to specific ideas listed such as--open it and see, ask somebody, look it up in a book, and so on. Comment that sometimes curiosity leads to interesting adventures. Again referring to the list on the board ask, "What might happen if you tried to find out _____?" Repeat this for several ideas listed and then ask the students to write a story about a curious person and the adventure that resulted from his curiosity.

A NOTE ON SOURCES:

The journal articles listed below were the most valuable of all that we examined. In addition, we would strongly recommend that teachers interested in composition obtain a micro-fiche copy of ED075853 from the ERIC system. ED075853 refers to a document entitled Composition C - D (Grades 3 and 4); Teachers Guide. The materials in this guide were developed through the Oregon Elementary English Project at Oregon University in Eugene. The guide contains practical, easy to use suggestions for teaching composition and was our most valuable source in the development of this idea book.

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